Around the League

Uni numbers around baseball.

Low and Outside

Last season pitchers **Wayne Gomes** of the Giants and **Rob Bell** of the Rangers tempted fate by wearing **single-digit uniform numbers**. Niether pitcher is working in the Majors now and probably serves them right.

Gomes, traded in midseason from the Phillies, took **the obscene No. 2** with the Giants and offered no explanation; Bell said he took **No. 6** with the Rangers because it was the **lowest number available.** Paul Lukas of *The Village Voice* correctly predicted that Gomes and Bell would became the first pair of pitchers whose **ERA was greater than their uniform numbers.** Today, both toil in the Minors -- Gomes for the Pirates' AAA Nashville Sounds (wearing No. 66); and Bell (No. 29 in your AAA Oklahoma Redhawks scorecard).

This season, no pitcher dares wear the single digit (exception: **Curtis Leskanic** of the Brewers, whose **No. 0 jersey** has gone un-worn for nearly a year. The Brewers' closer **suffered a rotator-cuff injury** not long after putting it on last season and has yet to return to active duty). Number Zero doesn't officially "count" as a single digit IMO anyway. It's better classified among "novelty" jerseys like 13 and 99).

Here's a list of low-number-wearing hurlers this year (using the Mets as an example of an average number-issuing team, we'll consider 15 the reasonable cut-off point):

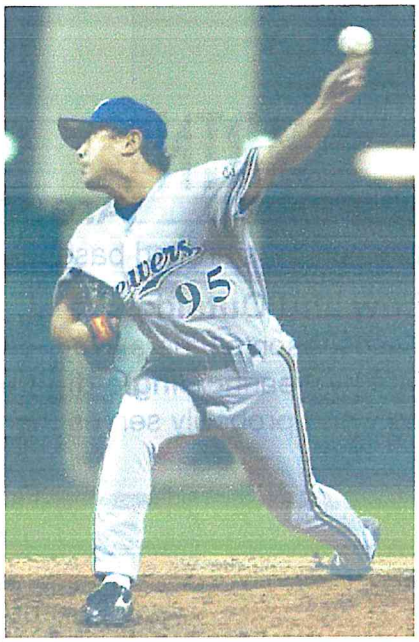
10: Mike Hampton (Rockies); Hideo Nomo (Dodgers)
12: Calvin Maduro, Orioles
13: Antonio Osuna (White Sox); Billy Wagner (Astros); Turk Wendell (Phillies); Rodrigo Lopez (Orioles)
14: Matt Anderson (Tigers); Ismael Valdes (Rangers)
15: Casey Fossum (Red Sox); Denny Neagle (Rockies).

Met pitchers in history 15 and below: 11: Corey Lidle; 12: Ron Darling; 13: Roger Craig,

Jeff Musselman, Neil Allen, Jonathan Hurst. 15: Tom Hall, Ron Darling, Rick Aguilera, Al Jackson, Dave Roberts.

Why do pitchers so seldom wear single digits? Simple, really. Teams initially assigned jerseys by batting order and few pitchers ever got into the top 8. That left most pitchers taking double-digits, and the tradition carries over to this day.

High Places



Nobody anywhere knows much about why the Milwaukee Brewers do anything, but they sure threw a curveball this season by dressing their newly acquired pitcher, **Takahito Nomura,** in the outrageous **No. 95.** Perhaps they were trying for their own version of **Ichiromania**, mimicking the Mariners and their feel-good Japanese sensation, Ichiro Suzuki, who wears the slightly unusual though hardly revolutionary No. 51.

Either way, we're shocked whenever we see Nomura. And by the way he's pitched early in the 2002 season, we might be shocked to see him at all much longer.

(If you're getting the impression by now that MBTN tends to frown on outrageous uniform numbers, you're right. We believe the great value of uniform numbers is that they link one player to the next in team history, forming common bonds. They shouldn't be used to separate players from one another or celebrate outrageousness, unless warrented. I mean, it's all well and good that **Brian Boeringer is wearing No. 71 on the Pirates this year.** But what did he do to deserve it? How are the Pirate historians gonna feel when they see this pedestrian journeyman forever standing apart from his teammates past and future? Confused, I'd imagine). Not that you asked, but **we also hate the designated hitter and the Wild Card.**

Using the Mets as a guide, we'll consider any number above 50 (position players) or 60 (pitcher) high. Here's a list of Major Leaguers this season who might be confused for batboys, bullpen catchers or Spring Training leftovers:

51: Bernie Williams (Yankees), Ichiro Suzuki (Mariners); Fernando Lunar, C (Orioles)
53: Bobby Abreu, OF (Phillies)
55: Carlos Hernandez, C (Athletics)
59: Rob Macowiack, OF (Pirates)
60: Scott Schoenweis, P (Angels), Victor Zambrano, P (Devil Rays); Geromino Gil, C (Orioles)
61: Travis Phelps, P (Devil Rays); Josh Beckett, P (Marlins); Livan Hernandez, P (Giants)
65: Adrian Hernandez, P (Yankees)
66: Rick Ankeil, P (Cardinals)
68: Brian Shouse, P (Royals)
71: Brian Boeringer (Pirates)
72: Robert Machado, C (Cubs)
73: Ricardo Rincon, P (Indians)

75: Barry Zito (Athletics)
77: Ben Weber (Angels)
95: Takahito Nomura, P (Brewers)

Corrections or comments

Home 1-10 11-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-99
Coaches Roster McKnightmare About Links Archives Email

It's All a Numbers Game at One Site

By DAVID SWEET
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL INTERACTIVE EDITION
[published 6-22-99]

When Jon Springer needed to pick an automatic-teller machine pin number before starting college in 1984, he didn't chose [sic] his birthday. He chose the numbers of two New York Mets.

"41-28 would be a Tom Seaver/John Milner," says Mr. Springer, who emphasizes to would-be muggers that is *not* his real pin number.

The same logic occasionally holds true when the 32-year-old remembers an address -- 1031 First Avenue would be Rusty Staub/Mike Piazza, with Mookie Wilson thrown in to figure out the street.

Six months ago, Mr. Springer, an editor at a trade publication in Manhattan, decided to share his passion for Mets uniform numbers with the world. Laid up with a ruptured Achilles' tendon, he pored through old yearbooks and scorebooks at his parents' house in Maine. In February, he unveiled "Mets by the Numbers," a site that traces the roughly 600 franchise players, from "Marvelous" Marv Throneberry to John Olerud, by their uniform digit.

One rarely hears about the man obsessed with accounting, or the lady entranced with marketing, launching sites. But the Internet has allowed baseball fanatics who still enjoy shuffling through shoe boxes of trading cards to publish their findings, no matter how bizarre.

Popular No. 6

One might think Mr. Springer's site would break one of the Web's cardinal rules: updated information is essential to attract repeat visitors. But players get injured, minor-league players are called up, and sentences such as this grace the site every few days: "Melvin Mora becomes the 25th man to wear Number 6 for the Mets, helping 6 strengthen its position as the most popular number in Mets history."

Further, alert readers send e-mails demanding corrections. Hubie Brooks actually made his major-league debut in 1980 wearing No. 62 before quickly switching to 39, wrote Greg Prince.

Mr. Prince, 36 and a Mets fan for three decades, is enamored with the site.

"I think it's fantastic. We often sit out at the park and say, 'Who wore No. 2 in 1993?' " says Mr. Prince, executive editor of Beverage World magazine.

In fact, Mr. Springer lambastes uniform No. 2, pointing out the number's futility from Mr. Throneberry to beleaguered catcher Mackey Sasser.

"The Mets have never had a great No. 2," says Mr. Springer, a Long Island native who started following the team in first grade.

Only die-hard Mets fans can appreciate some of the information Mr. Springer has unearthed. Under "Hawaii 5-0," he
writes, "Benny Agbayani joins Sid Fernandez as Hawaiian-born players to wear No. 50." (No audio link of the popular 1970s crime show is offered.) Uniform number 37 has been issued only once in Mets history -- to its first manager, Casey Stengel. And how about No. 46? "A lot of nobodies here," notes Mr. Springer, including "8th string catcher Chris Jelic" and "washed-up
fireman Barry Jones."

Mr. Springer's brainchild is far from the only offbeat baseball site on the Web. A list of baseball-themed postage stamps from around the world, including a 1991 Don Mattingly stamp from Central Africa and a Mike Greenwell offering from St. Vincent, has been compiled by a man named Ed Stephan. Rob Homa of Brooklyn, N.Y., has dedicated a site to the approximately 1,500 baseball games, from Single A to Major League Baseball, he's enjoyed in person. Included is every date and score over the years.

"The neat thing about it is putting in my totals, like 'What's my record for Yankees-Oakland at Yankee Stadium,' " says Mr. Homa, 34. "It's a personal thing."

Back at "Mets by the Numbers," Mr. Springer certainly understands.

"As a means to publish almost anything, no matter how ridiculous or narrow your focus is, it [the Internet] is a tremendous resource," he says.

Back to Intro

Back Home

1-10 11-20 21-30
31-40 41-50 51-99

Home
All-time Roster
Coaches & managers
McKnightmare
Around the League
Links
Email

About this site

About Numbers About Me Research Credits

About numbers

Numbers were first worn in 1916, when the Cleveland Indians affixed digits to their sleeves, in an apparent attempt to allow fans and writers to distinguish players at a glance. The experiment was abandoned, however, until the 1929 season, when the Yankees began assigning numbers that corresponded with players' spots in the batting order (Ruth #3, Gehrig # 4, and so on). By 1932, all teams were wearing numbers on their uniforms.

Traditionally, baseball teams assigned position players numbers between 1-25, and pitchers 25 and above, with backup catchers usually wearing numbers in the 30s and 40s and coaching staffs in the 50s. Today, largely because of the whims of the players, it's not all that unusual to see nontraditional numbers assigned (Turk Wendell's 99; Rey Ordonez' 0; or Brian McRae's 56 for instance).

Numbers lend the only uniqueness to players who otherwise are all dressed alike. And since only one number can be worn at any one point of time, the player who wears that number defines his unique moment in team history. Isolate the number, and you have a broader history -- an artificial extended family linking moment to moment. Those of you who have read Kurt Vonnegut's *Slapstick (Lonsome No More!)* should understand.

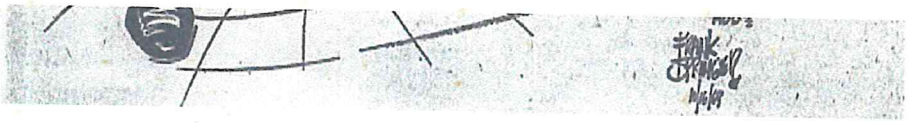
As such, I've designed this site as a sort of guided history tour.

This site first went up on Feb. 22, 1999. It was redesigned and updated often since then, with new photos, features and additional player info. It continues to be a work in progress, updated every time new players join the team or new information comes to light. The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition did an article about this site in July of 1999: You can read it here. A visitor once described this site as **an "on-line coffee table book."** I thought that was cool.

Seal of Approval

About Me

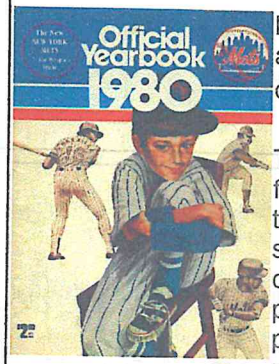
My name is Jon, and I 'm a Met fan, born into a Mets family on Long Island in 1966 (That's me on the far left of that family photo at Shea, with my brothers and Dad. It was my 12th birthday). My father Frank, who was born in Queens, was a Brooklyn Dodgers fan and like many New Yorkers, pledged allegiance to the Mets when they came to town in 1962. A freelance cartoonist, my dad covered the Mets for the *Suffolk Sun* in 1969 — I've reprinted one of his cartoons from the Oct. 17, 1969, edition below ("Not one of my best," says the artist). My older brother Bill is also a Mets fan, and between the junk he and my dad filed away I received much of the 1960s materials I researched for this project.



I went to my first Mets game in 1971, but my clear memories begin in 1973, when I began collecting baseball cards and got caught up in the "Ya Gotta Believe" season that year. My loyalty would be tested often since then -- particularly through the unpleasantness of the early 90s teams and the '94 strike -- but I resolutely stuck with the Mets through the few rewards and many frustrations they provided.

Research

At first, this project was essentially a matter of transferring data from my head to the computer. While I have virtually no facility with numbers as they relate to arithmetic, I have always managed to connect numbers to Mets and back again as a way to remember locker combinations, phone numbers and pin codes.



But when it came down to putting it all on paper, my memory wasn't nearly as accurate as I thought it was. Was Darryl Boston a 6 or an 8? Felix Millan... a 16, 17, or both?

To find out, I scoured all the old scorecards, yearbooks and baseball cards I could find. I was surprised by the multitude of players who wore more than one number for the Mets and among the most difficult things was figuring out just when the player switched. To cut down on confusion, I ignored Spring Training numbers and concentrate instead on those they wore during the regular season. However, if a player was on the active roster in-season I have included them, whether or not they played a game (Jerry Moses in 1975 and Mac Suzuki in 1999, for instance) since they occupied a number.

There remain spots here where I find myself in the path of seeming discrepancies I can't yet explain, and though I was pretty thorough, I make no guarantee that the information here is completely accurate.

I expect I'll be getting corrections for some time to come, and I'll credit anyone who delivers accurate updates or corrects a mistake. Also, as the Mets continue to evolve, the pages are updated and corrected accordingly. So check back often.

Credits

I scanned most of the photos and artwork myself, though I have swiped a few from other sites (if there is copyrighted material here, please inform me). I wrote and edited all the copy, designed the graphics, and

hacked my way through the HTML myself. If you wish to borrow content from here, please inform me first.

The without-whose-generous-contributions list includes my father and brother, my buddy Scott (Delaware's biggest Mets fan now that I'm gone); and a number of people I've never met who responded to my questions via Brian Hoch's terrific Web site, Mets Online, including columnist Jonathan Weissman, who delivered the uniform numbers of more than 150 obscure and missing Mets on my list. Ernie Alston, who maintains an excellent site on early Mets history, has provided several corrections and minutae. Dennis D'Agostino's 1981 classic, "This Date in New York Mets History," provided a number of surprising yet accurate discoveries. Chris in the Mets' PR Department, Jason from South Jersey, Irv, Mark, the talented Greg P., Ellis, Glen, Mike J, Mark in Japan, KC, Jack, Ed A, Dave from Retrosheet, and still others helped finish it up. Thanks to all.

Anyway, enjoy the site (and be patient as the graphics load). If you have questions, comments, suggestions or corrections, please email me.

Thanks and many happy recaps,

Jon

1-10 Home | 11-20 All-time Roster | 21-30 Coaches-Managers | 31-40 McKnightmare | 41-50 Links | 51-99 Email